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ABSTRACT

The application of group counseling to emotionally disturbed school children in Chinese culture was examined. Two junior high schools located in Tao-Yuan Province were randomly selected with two eighth-grade classes randomly selected from each school. Ten emotionally disturbed students were chosen from each class and randomly assigned to two experimental groups and two control groups. The subjects in the treatment groups received 10 consecutive 2-hour weekly group counseling sessions, the content of which consisted of discussion, role-playing, art works, dance therapy and other group techniques. Instruments used to assess the treatment effects included the Mooney Problem Check Lists-Junior High Form, Social Anxiety Scale, California Test of Personality, and Self-Evaluation Form. Separate analysis of variance was employed. Study results indicate that those who received group counseling showed a significant reduction in the number of adjustment problems, with no reduction of social anxiety or improvement in personal and social adjustment. (Author/BMW)

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Group Counseling with Emotionally Disturbed School Children in Taiwan

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U. S. A.

BY

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Group Counseling with Emotionally Disturbed School Children in Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

During the past 50 years, increasing worldwide attention has been paid to the problem of emotionally disturbed school children. Many researches and studies have been done and published, contributing to the understanding of this problem. For example, Wickman (I928); Olson (I930); Rogers (I942); Ullmann (I952); Howe (I958); Bower (I960); Telford (I967); O'Leary and Becker (I967); Hewett (I967); Hobbs (I969); Rutter and Graham (I970); Polk and Schafer (I972), etc.

Among the first major studies on the problem of early identification of emotionally disturbed school children, Ullmann (I952) found that teachers identified 8 percent of their pupils as maladjusted. Bower (I960) found that the teachers rated I0.5% of school children as overly aggressive or defiant (conduct disorder) or overly withdrawn and timid (personality disorder). The Bureau of Education for the handicapped, Office of Education, reported in their I970 Annual Report that 2% of all school-aged children were emtionally disturbed. Among all types of handicap, the emotionally disturbed held the third place in I968. The number of emotionally disturbed children were estimated at 800,000 in the same year. Rutter and Graham (I970) found that 5.7% of some 2,200 nine-to-eleven-year-old children were considered to have some clinically significant psychiatric disorder. Neurotic (personality) and antisocial (conduct) disorders were the two largest diagnostic groups. The problem of emtionally disturbed school children is indeed serious.

Many different terms have been employed to describe children with adjustment problems. Terms like "emtionally disturbed", "personality maladjusted", "socially maladjusted" have been frequently used. Telford (I967) tried to distinguish the difference between "emtionally disturbed" and "socially maladjusted". Others made no distinction. Bower (I960) described five qualities which characterized such students:

I) An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors.
2) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationship with peers and teachers.
3) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal conditions.
4) A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
5) A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears associated with personal or schcol problems.

Therefore, emotionally disturbed school children are characterized by inner tension and anxiety. They display neurotic and psychotic behaviors

which interfere with the lives of others and his own growth and development.

Quay, Morse, and Cutler (I966) found that there are three patterns of behavior clusters among the emotionally disturbed children:

I) Conduct disorders (also called unsocialized aggressive or psychopathic behavior):- defiance, disobedience, impertinence, uncooperativeness, irritability, boisterousness, attention seeking, bullying, temper tantrums, hyperactiveness, restlessness and negativism.
2) Personality problem dimensions (sometimes referred to as neurotic or overinhibited):- hypersensitive, shy, self-conscious, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-confidence, easily frustrated and overdependent.
3) The inadequate inmature dimension:- inattentive, sluggish, lacking interest in school, lazy, preoccupied, daydreams, drowsy and retic-ent, including autism or prepsychotic conditions.

While Hewitt and Jenkins (I945) identified three patterns of maladjustment, each being associated with a different home situation:

1) The unsocialized aggressive child:- from broken homes, received no love or attention in infancy. No attachment to any group or anyone.
2) The socialized aggressive child:- had some security with the mother in infancy, but later rejected.
3) The overinhibited child:- from overprotective families in higher socio-economic levels.

Compare with the many researches and studies on the application of group techniques to school children with adjustment problems in the West, there are very few studies done in this area in Taiwan. The present study is designed to test the application of group counseling to maladjusted school children in Chinese culture.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine whether group counseling will have effects upon the behavior of maladjusted Chinese school children and what are the effects. Three hypotheses are postulated to be tested:

I) Those who received group counseling will show a significant decrease in their social anxiety than those who did not.
2) Those who received group counseling will show a significant reduction in their adjustment problems.
3) Those who received group counseling will show a significant better personal and social adjustment.

METHOD

Subjects

The emotionally disturbed school children in this study are selected by the following criteria:

1) Those who are regarded by their classroom teachers to have shown observable conduct disorders or personality problems such as truancy, lying, fighting, diobedience, destructiveness, restlessness, overly shy, easily frustrated, withdrawn, etc.
2) Those who score the highest scores in the Mooney Problem Check Lists.

Two junior high schools located in Tao-Yuan Province are randomly selected for this study. Two eighth-grade male classes are randomly selected from each school. All students in these classes are administered the Mooney Problem Check Lists. Ten students with the highest scores are selected from each class. Only those who are willing to participate are chosen for the study. These 40 students are then randomly assigned into two experimental groups and two control groups.

Assessment

Three assessment questionnaires were administered immediately before and after the treatment program. In addition, a self-evaluation questionnaire was administered to subjects in the experimental groups after the treatment. Instruments employed to assess the effects of group counseling included:

1) The Mooney Problem Check Lists - Junior High School Form (Chinese Revision). This instrument was designed to identify problem areas of maladjustments.
2) Social Anxiety Scale, adapted and revised from Watson and Friend's Fear and Negative Evaluation Scale and Social Avoidance and Distress Scale. This instrument was developed to measure social anxiety of a person in various social situations.
3) California Test of Personality, a test originally developed by L. P. Thorpe, et al., and revised in Chinese. It was constructed to measure personal adjustment and social adjustment.
4) Self-Report. A questionnaire designed to measure a subjective evaluation of the group experience on a person's attitude and behavior changes.

Treatment

The subjects in the treatment groups received 10 consecutive 2-hour weekly group counseling. The content of group counseling consists

of discussion, role-playing, psychodrama, art therapy, dance therapy, and other group techniques. In addition to the I0 subjects in the treatment groups, two male counselors (the author and an associate) were present at each session to facilitate group counseling. The subjects in the control groups received no treatment. After ten weeks, both experimental and control groups were recontacted and reassessed to evaluate the treatment effects.

RESULTS

During the course of the study, three students in the control groups transferred to another school, and additional two students did not show up for post-test. Therefore, only I5 subjects in the control groups were included in the final analysis. As for the experimental groups, six students dropped out in the middle or near the end of the program and did not complete the post-test. Therefore, only I4 subjects were included in the final analysis. A summary of the pre-treatment and posttreatment mean scores and standard deviations for the two groups on each measures is presented in Table I.

Table I

Pre- and Post-treatment Means and Standard Deviations on Each Measures

		Measures					
		Mooney Problem Check-Lists		Social Anxiety Scale		California Test of Personality	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Treatment Groups (n = I4)	M	79.I4	6I.86	I7.2I	I7.86	I00.43	98.36
	SD	33.84	33.05	5.24	5.88	23.44	I9.79
Control Groups (n = I5)	M	80.33	82.80	I8.67	I6.07	83.67	83.73
	SD	27.65	35.80	4.67	5.40	I6.28	I5.97

To evaluate the treatment effects, the method of separate analysis

of variance was employed. Variables were analyzed for differences between groups, differences between treatments, and the interaction between the two. No significant differences were found between gr oups, between treatments or interactions. However, a further analysis revealed that there were significant differences between the pre- and post-treatment scores on the Mooney Problem Check-Lists for the treatment groups ($t = 2.37$, $p < .05$).

As for the measure of Self-Report, more encouraging results were found. A descriptive summary of the findings was presented in Table II.

Table II

Number and Percentage of Persons Who Answered "Yes" to the Questions in Self-Report

Questions (N = I4)	No.	%
I) Do you find any changes in yourself after the group experience?	I3	92.9
2) What are the changes? (In order of importance)		
Better understanding of self		
Better understanding of others		
Much happier than before		
More sociable		
Less uptight and tense		
Less hot-tempered		
Life philosophy changed		
3) What are your greatest gain from this experience? (In order of importance)		
Get to know new friends		
More aware of self and own problems		
Learn how to understand others		
More aware of interpersonal relationship		
Happier than before		
More willing to help others		
More willing to open up oneself and share with others		
Not afraid of strangers		
4) Do you think you understand yourself better after the group experience?	I2	85.7

Questions	No.	%
5) Do you think you are more aware of others' feelings after the group experience?	I4	I00
6) Do you think you are more tolerant and caring about others?	I3	92.8
7) Do you think this group experience is worthwhile and meaningful?	I4	I00

DISCUSSION

The results of this study seem to support the hypothesis that those who received group counseling have shown a significant reduction in their adjustment problems than those who did not. However, the findings did not support the hypotheses that group counseling help to reduce social anxiety and improve personal and social adjustment.

The failure of the two dependable measures to demonstrate significant reduction in anxiety and improvement on personal and social adjustment may be due to the fact that the brief group experience was not sufficiently potent enough to generate changes on the variables tapped by the instruments. The group experience was fairly successful in affecting relatively simple attitudinal variables, such as self-awareness and understanding of others. But more obvious behavioral changes require a more intensive group experience to reflect changes.

Spielberger (I966) has advocated that there is a difference between anxiety as a transitory state and anxiety as a relatively unchanging personality trait. D'augelli (I974) supported his theory and found that the trait anxiety remained unchanged over time, while state anxiety varied in reaction to interpersonal situations that may have been perceived as potentially threatening. Therefore, an alternate explanation is that the measure of Social Anxiety Scale either measures only trait anxiety or it is not an appropriate instrument for the purpose of this study.

Murray and Jacobson (I969) advanced another explanation that variables unique to groups, such as the presence of several others, and the discussion of intermember relationship may actually promote feelings of tension and apprehension in group members. In view of

the rather timid and shy personality of Chinese children, this may be a valid reason to account for the slight increase in the post-treatment scores on the Social Anxiety Scale for the experimental groups. It is also interesting to find that two other studies on Chinese school children and college youths yields the same results. A study on junior high school children by the Guidance Office of Taipei Municipal Nan-Mun Junior High School (I978) found that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of either pre- and post-test, or experimental and control groups on the Social Anxiety Scale. Another study on Chinese college students (Shin-Chian Lee, I977) found that there is an increase in the posttreatment mean scores on the Social Anxiety Scale for one of the experimental groups.

Review of the research on small group experience indicate that participants consistently report that their group experience was a positive and meaningful experience. Results from the present study are compatible with these findings. Subjects in the research were very much appreciative of the opportunity for the meaningful and personal group interaction. Successful treatment results have been reported in both West and East studies in group counseling with emotionally disturbed school children (Howe, I955; Chu-Chang Chen, I964; Li-Wei Yeh, I97I). The findings on the measures of Self-Report and the Mooney Problem Check-Lists correspond with the findings of Hewitt and Kraft (I973) that those who received group treatment demonstrated a significant improvement in their self-concept, openness, and interpersonal relationship with others.

The mechanism behind this effect is probably due to the fact that Chinese social values stress the importance of getting into a famous high school that a child is deprived of all his extracurricular activities. The group counseling provides a temporary relief from the burden of schoolwork and an opportunity to establish a more harmonious relationship with peers students and adult counselors. The emotionally disturbed school children were given an opportunity to learn to modify their acting-out behaviors and express their feelings and emotion in more constructive ways of verbal expression.

However, the high dropout rate in the experimental groups seems to warrant some explanation and discussion. It was found that there was a discrepancy between what the students expected of the group activities and what the group experiences actually provided. The students expected a series of outdoor fun games and exercises, while the planned program consisted mainly of indoor activities loaded with discussion and verbal communication. This discrepancy in expectation and disillusionment are believed to contribute to early dropouts. The second factor is probably due to the non-structured nature of the group. Bednar, Melnick and Kaul (I974) have pointed out that lack of structure in early sessions not only

fails to facilitate group development but actually feeds members distortions, interpersonal fears, subjective distress which interfere with group development and contribute to premature dropouts. A similar study on Chinese college students (Chia-Hsing Lin, I978) came up with the same conclusion. Therefore, the author strongly recommends that a more structured group experience should be provided for further studies on Chinese school children or college youths.

In addition to these two factors, the author has strong reason to believe that the attitudes of school administrators toward group counseling play a very important role in the success of the program. Frank and Zilback (I968), and Minde and Werry (I969) have attached great importance to the influence of the school situation upon the effectiveness of group treatment. The auther found that the administrators of the two schools involved were not very supportive. The Office of Student Discipline in one of the schools seriously interfered with the group activities by preventing or discouraging students from coming to the College Counseling Center for group counseling. The students were so discouraged and frustrated that during the last part of the program some of the students just refused to come to the program. Secondly, the counselor in one of the two schools was so busy with his other responsibilities that he just had no time to provide the needed coordination and supports. Thirdly, the group session was scheduled from 3 to 5 in the afternoon while the school is over at 4. Members in the group were worrying for staying behind and getting home late. Fourthly, the pressure from study was tremendous, especially before and during the exam week, that members were not able to concentrate during some of the group sessions.

After numerous careful observation and listening to the problems of these emotionally disturbed school children, the author has come to the conclusion that the root of their problem is indeed complex and manifold. Too often, many parents are overly ambitious for their children's progress in school. They want their children to be top students in class even though the children do not have the capacity. Persistence in this attitude develops in the child various forms of deviant behavior. They may rebel against school or do less well than they would have otherwise, or they just withdraw from efforts to succeed. Behavior disorders sometimes are the outcome of frustration resulting from the discrepancy between the child's capacity to perform and the requirements of the environment, which includes his family, his community, and the school.

Furthermore, the biased attitudes of teachers towards students also contributed to the creation of conduct disorders. When teachers assume that students in the competence-based grouped "poor" classes are prone to behave badly, the students will behave accordingly. Also, if inappropriate

teaching methods ignore the individual difference of students, it will cause boredom and resentment on the students which will indirectly contribute to the appearance of disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

The author was astounded to find that corporal punishment is still generally enforced in junior high schools. Quite often, students were corporally punished not for violation of school regulations but just for his failure to pass certain exams. Unless the practice of corporal punishment is properly and carefully employed, the problem of conduct disorders will never disappear from the school.

In light of the above discussion, the author is inclined to propose a modified ecological strategy (Hobbs, 1969) to deal with the problem of emotionally disturbed school children in Chinese culture. This approach rejects the total reliance on psychotherapy and assumes that the child is an inseparable part of a small social system, of a ecological unit made up of the child, his family, his school, his neighborhood and his community. Special counseling groups should be organized to reeducate emotionally disturbed children for a semester or school year, with a liaison teacher to modify the attitudes of the home, the school and the community. Unless the attitudes of all those involved are changed, all efforts in changing individual students will be fruitless and futile.

Secondly, in order for any group counseling program to be effective, full cooperation and support must first be obtained from the school and the parents.

Thridly, the author would strongly recommend a more structured kind of group experience for students brought up in Chinese culture to avoid unnecessary anxiety, boredom and premature dropouts.

Fourthly, more flexible programs with nonverbal communication emphasis should be designed and provided to meet the specific needs of Chinese junior high school children.

Finally, individual counseling must be made available to those students in the group who might have the need for one-to-one counseling, and those who can not be reached in a group situation.

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